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SOCIAL, HUMANITARIAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE

Statement submitted by Rotary International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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Rotary International would like to express its view on one of the most important subjects concerning human life - hunger and malnutrition.

Whenever drought or sudden economic or civil disruption occurs, whenever there are either natural or man-made disasters, large numbers of people need and seek food and water to live. There is mass starvation and migration. There is famine.

Famine is an instance of extreme hunger, but it is only a small portion of the world hunger crisis. Famine only constitutes 10 per cent of the world's daily hunger-related deaths. Ninety per cent is the silent devastation that rarely makes headlines. Most of the world's hungry do not suffer from the hunger of famine but from chronic hunger, the on-going deprivation of calories and protein needed for healthy, normal living. The chronically hungry cannot find enough food and are slowly debilitated. This daily deprivation reduces physical capacities, hinders growth, and lowers the body's defenses against otherwise preventable disease and illness.

Children are among the most vulnerable victims of chronic hunger. Food deprivation for them means malnutrition for their physical and mental well-being. It impairs their learning processes. Thus, they are deprived of the most important factors for their future life prospects.

Hunger, as distinct from famine, can be massively reduced at the local grass-roots level through the concerted efforts of non-governmental organizations working in partnership with local civil authorities or unilaterally. Rotary International is one of these NGOs committed to reducing hunger and malnutrition throughout the world, through its 26,800 clubs in 185 countries and geographical areas.

Like those in the public sector, we have seen the need to create a "political will" or direction to accomplish this over the years. Thus, reducing hunger and malnutrition is policy - policy to support two other major Rotary objectives everywhere - the reduction and/or elimination of childhood diseases and the reduction or elimination of illiteracy. Our concern for children's health has resulted in our Polio-Plus Program, carried out with the help of the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization. Polio, it is hoped, will be eliminated from the face of this planet by the year 2000. We have committed $240 million to this objective.

In March 1992, Rotary International's Board of Directors adopted the following statement with respect to our position on the alleviation of hunger:

"Whereas Rotary International recognizes that:

"The object of alleviating hunger must receive high priority;

"In this respect children, mothers and the aged are particularly vulnerable groups and require our primary concern;

"The struggle against hunger is the shared responsibility of all people world wide;

"A substantial reduction in hunger and malnutrition is possible through the enhancement of existing programmes;

"The problem of famine and malnutrition now represents the most important socio-political challenge towards world understanding and peace;

"Social mobilization is required to gain world community consent and support.

"Rotary International therefore supports and agrees to encourage efforts to meet the following four goals during the decade:

"The alleviation of starvation and death caused by famine;

"A substantial reduction in malnutrition and mortality among children;

"A tangible reduction of chronic hunger;

"The elimination of major diseases, a consequence of inadequate nutrition."

In a subsequent decision in November 1992, the Board encouraged all Rotary Clubs and districts to commemorate annually the United Nations World Food Day, 16 October, through appropriate community activities, and further, to develop a network of both government, national and international, including United Nations, agencies and other non-governmental organizations, as resources and collaborators for our clubs and districts in urgent hunger alleviation projects. In 1992 and 1993 we established a Committee to Combat Hunger and then a world-wide Task Force on Hunger. In addition, the Rotary Foundation is committed to making both regular matching grants and special health, hunger and humanity grants for the purpose of alleviating hunger.

Rotary-supported projects must benefit the community, should provide sustainable solutions for the long-term goal, and should be aimed at community self-sufficiency. Not only do our clubs participate but also our young Rotaracts, our Village Corps and our Volunteers. According to annual reports from district chairmen of our world community service, more than 1,000 projects, national and international, took place in 1992-1993, and the number is far higher today, from Bangladesh to Kenya to the Philippines to Bosnia, Uganda, Senegal, Mexico and Nepal, to name a few.

This work, to attain sustainability, involves many educational projects combining nutritional and vocational education, work with local hospitals, education of farmers in sustainable agricultural methods, development of locally owned animal husbandry cooperatives and fisheries, design and construction of rural irrigation systems, environment-friendly projects, including tree-planting, better agricultural methods, crop rotation and contouring, and even solar cookers where useful and adaptable. Many clubs also work on constructing wells and irrigation projects. A number establish self-sustaining revolving funds for farmers to make them self-sufficient.

Our resource list of organizations combating hunger is now up to 69 organizations, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Food Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund, among United Nations agencies.

As part of this endeavour, we have also created new programmes and searched for more collaborators for disaster relief. Our international organization list now numbers about 20 private and public organizations and foundations, and United Nations agencies, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Food Programme. We routinely send out disaster relief notices to all districts. We have established a President's relief grant of up to $5,000 for districts which apply for emergency relief. On the other hand, our clubs raised more than $6 million in funding, donations-in-kind - food, medicines, clothing, hospital supplies - for Bosnian and Croatian refugees last year. Our United Kingdom clubs have developed emergency schemes for disaster relief. In the past few years, we have been active on a world-wide basis in most hurricane, earthquake, and flood relief efforts.

Finally, we have issued two new publications: Combatting Hunger and Disaster Relief Guide. We shall be happy to provide these to you.

Rotary International would like to emphasize most importantly the fact that there are numerous non-governmental organizations and networks that are the natural collaborators with Governments and United Nations agencies and can get the job done at the grass-roots level, which is where it counts, after all.